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Guest columnist

Rules will protect nation's vital secrets

WASHINGTON — Since the days of the Founding Fathers, we have recognized the need to protect military and diplomatic secrets. This need is even more acute today because of the dangerous world in which we live.

An example of the threat we face was provided only last week. A Silicon Valley engineer was charged with receiving \$250,000 for passing secrets about U.S. ballistic missile programs through Polish agents to the Soviet KGB.

Our vital secrets are also in danger from the steady stream of unauthorized disclosures in the media, usually called "leaks." The damage can be just as serious when secrets are disclosed in a newspaper or book as when stolen by a spy.

President Reagan has directed that steps be taken to improve our government's ability to keep secret properly classified information. Some members of Congress have tried to block parts of this program because of their opposition to polygraph testing and secrecy agreements requiring prepublication review.

Our polygraph screening program would be limited to about 100,000 defense department employees and about 10,000 in the rest of the government. In addition, the polygraph could be used to investigate particular disclosures of classified information.

The polygraph policy has numerous safeguards. For example, employees with civil service protection or in the armed forces cannot be fired for re-

Richard K. Willard is deputy assistant attorney general.

fusing to take a polygraph test. However, they could be transferred to less sensitive jobs at the same pay level.

Secrecy agreements requiring prepublication review have been used at CIA for many years. The Supreme Court upheld their use in the Snepp case.

The president's directive extends this kind of secrecy agreement to about 110,000 other government employees who have access to the same highly classified information as CIA.

These employees will be required to submit to the government any books, articles or other writings about specified intelligence matters. Review must be completed in 30 days, and, in practice, is normally finished much sooner. Only classified information can be taken out. In fact, the government must be able to prove in court that every word taken out was properly classified.

Of course, the "classified" stamp can be misused. President Reagan has issued specific orders to cut back on unnecessary and improper classification. Secrecy must be limited to situations where it really counts.

However, our government's ability to protect those really vital secrets is not adequate today. The president's program begins to address this serious problem. Congress should cooperate in this effort and not seek to obstruct it.